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G/TIP FOR MEGAN HALL
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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS PRESS BLITZ CONTINUES

¶1. (U) Summary: Regular trafficking in persons (TIP) articles continue to be published in the state-controlled press, and public service announcements are prevalent in all forms of mass media. Uzbekistan's extensive efforts on raising public awareness and highlighting its powerful new criminal code demonstrate that it remains serious about combating the issue. The recently established national inter-agency commission also lashed out at two of its provincial-level counterparts for not doing enough, a sign that the new coordinating body is taking its mission seriously. End summary.

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¶2. (U) On his April 22 commute to work, poloff noticed a radio advertisement in Tashkent warning citizens against the dangers of trafficking in persons. Resisting the urge that Uzbek officials sometimes have to advise citizens to stay put and that the grass is not greener abroad, this radio announcement informed Uzbeks that their government is available to help them if they get into trouble overseas. It noted that, in the event of trouble or if they become victims of TIP, they should "seek help at the nearest Embassy or Consulate of Uzbekistan." It proceeded to note that the Government of Uzbekistan can facilitate any necessary travel documents and help make arrangements to return home. At that moment, poloff looked out the window and noticed one of many full-size billboards on the streets of Tashkent warning against the dangers of TIP. The taxi driver commented "yes, these ads about trafficking in persons have been everywhere lately, and I see them at home on television, too." (Note: The number of reported TIP cases is up and yet the main local anti-TIP NGO Istiqbolli Avlod noted it is serving fewer numbers of victims, which it attributed to increasing public willingness to turn to the government for help. Radio promotions such as described above are an example of how this outreach can help build public confidence. End note.)

Inter-Agency Commission Gets Tough with the Provinces

¶3. (U) On April 8, the official Uzbekistan National News Agency website reported that the national inter-agency anti-TIP commission, which was established in 2008 in accordance with new legislation, convened a meeting to discuss the work of the corresponding prQincial level anti-TIP commissions in Bukhara and Andijon Provinces. The article noted that the national commission criticized the work of the territorial commissions in these two provinces and defined measures to improve their activities." A separate article on UzReport.com, also published on April 8, reported that the national commission "harshly criticized" Andijon and Bukhara's efforts to date, and noted that the chairmen of the two provincial committees were present for the drubbing from the

high-ranking national inter-agency committee members, which convened at the Office of the Prosecutor-General in the capital in the presence of journalists. (Comment: With a national inter-agency committee and 12 provincial ones established almost simultaneously, it was inevitable that some provinces would get off to a faster start than others or take it more seriously. This sort of public shaming sends a powerful message to all provincial hokims that Tashkent wants them to take the anti-TIP efforts seriously. End comment.)

Justice Ministry Publishes Account of Tashkent City Anti-TIP Commission

¶4. (U) On April 7, the Ministry of Justice published a report about a meeting of the capital district's recently formed inter-agency anti-TIP commission, which is separate from the 12 provinces. It offered a glimpse into how such gatherings are organized and noted that "all of the district prosecutors, their deputies, and the heads of all internal affairs departments, their deputies, and officials from other relevant organizations" were in attendance. The agenda included an analysis of how the prosecutors supervise TIP investigations based on the operational plan for the first half of 2009 set by the city prosecutor's office. Significantly, the report also mentioned that the Tashkent mayor's office, in cooperation with law enforcement officials, made appearances in the media and held events at educational institutions and influential neighborhood (mahalla) committees. The meeting also discussed "mistakes and shortcomings" in the work of some sub-districts in this field, and noted the need "to pay particular attention to protecting victims." (Comment: This demonstrates the inter-agency committees seem to be earnestly playing the coordinating role on anti-TIP efforts as the 2008 legislation envisioned. End comment.)

Andijon TIP Cases

¶5. (U) On March 26, the prominent national paper "Narodnoe Slovo" (People's Word) named four residents of the eastern city of Andijon as having been trafficked to Kazakhstan for labor exploitation after a Tursunpolat Xolmatov promised them a job "for at least USD 400 per month." The four men suffered hardships but managed to come back to Uzbekistan, where they alerted authorities. Citing a separate Andijon Province case, the same report named two female traffickers - Mavjuda Pirmatova and Mavluda Mominova - as having promised six people "great jobs" in Kazakhstan but then "sold" the victims for USD 1,700 to accomplices north of the border. These victims - all men - also managed to return home and report the incident. (Comment: The more people learn about these types of incidents, the more they are willing to report them to authorities, which has contributed to the rise of TIP complaints and investigations. End note.)

Namangan Statistics

¶6. (U) On March 4, the "Namangan Haqiqati" (Truth) published a report by Abdurahim Dadaboyev, a senior lawyer of the provincial internal affairs department responsible for protecting human rights, documenting various anti-TIP measures being undertaken. Dadaboyev included data that there were 131 TIP crimes in Namangan Province in 2008, and investigations established that there were 343 victims, of whom 318 were men, 25 were women, and 11 were children. It also documented that there were 85 offenders against whom criminal proceedings were launched. (Comment: Namangan is in the populous and more conservative Ferghana Valley, and the data indicates that the vast majority of victims from this part of the country are males. End comment.)

TV Broadcast on Kashkadarya Province Cases

¶7. (U) On February 19, Uzbek TV broadcast a program entitled "Tracing a Crime," which documented several TIP cases in Kashkadarya Province. It named a female offender from the town of Kitob, Dilfuza Gofurova, who allegedly took several local women abroad and forced them into prostitution. The television report

included interviews with victims, and Kitob District Prosecutor Bohodir Erkayev stated that Gofurova sold the women to a Turkish national for USD 4,000 and that an investigation was underway. The same television report described another case in Kitob in which a Gayrat Rahmonov and his brother Golibjon Rahmonov allegedly deceived local residents and took them to the Chelyabinsk Region of Russia for labor exploitation. A third story in the broadcast described victims who were trafficked to Almaty, Kazakhstan by suspects Rustam Alixonov and Jora Soatov for labor exploitation. Significantly, Qamashi District Prosecutor Shodiyon Jumaqulov commented that the prosecutor's office helped the victims collect damages for lost wages of 13 million soum (about USD 9,000), which is an example of government efforts to facilitate restitution for victims. (Note: It is becoming more common to see the names of the accused published in press reports about TIP cases, which is significant in an Asian culture that highly values "face." End note.)

Prosecutions

¶ 18. (U) On April 7, a report appeared in "Inson va Qonun" about three convictions - including two female offenders - with prison terms of eight or nine years each for trafficking Uzbek women to the UAE for sexual exploitation. A March 23 article in the paper "Ma'rifat" reported that several young women from central Samarkand Province were trafficked to foreign countries and forced into prostitution, but that the offenders "have stood trial and were punished accordingly." On March 5, "Noviy Vek" (New Century) quoted Iskander Usmanov, Deputy Head of the Prosecutor's Office for Tashkent Province (which excludes Tashkent City), as saying that "53 people were convicted and sentenced for TIP crimes in the past two years" in this province. On February 25, "Tashkent Mahalla" reported the prosecution of Khorezm Province resident Ismoil Rozmetov for trafficking 12 men to Kazakhstan after promising them jobs with salaries of USD 300-350 per month; they were actually forced to work at a construction site.

Comment:

¶ 19. (U) The accounts above illustrate how the state-controlled mass media in Uzbekistan has become a useful source of information on TIP cases as well as a means of raising public awareness. Long after our annual TIP submission cable was transmitted, the Government of Uzbekistan is still ensuring that TIP is a regularly recurring theme in the press. The stories also demonstrate that the recently established inter-agency anti-TIP commissions -- both at the national and provincial level - are capable of playing an effective coordinating role as envisioned by 2008 legislation and the national action plan. Singling out lagging provinces for national criticism is a not-so-subtle encouragement for all 12 provinces to focus on further efforts to combat trafficking in persons.

BUTCHER